

Starting an Instrumental Music Ministry in Your Church

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To many in worship leading, the concept of an instrumental music program may seem “high-falootin’”, to some “passé”, or to some . . . daunting. As an instrumentalist . . . first, and a singer . . . second, I want to encourage you, no matter the size and no matter the style of your church, to consider starting an instrumental music program for various reasons.

It’s biblical – This by no means implies that it’s the exclusively correct way of worship I’m simply suggesting that some of the most celebratory times of worship were accented with the addition of instruments. Examples include: 1 Samuel 10:5, 2 Samuel 6:5, 1 Chronicles 13:8, 15:16, 15:28. The Psalms also have several . . . 81:2-3, 92:3, 150. This doesn’t cover the use of the instruments in banquets and in the more militant sense of the tribe.

It’s inclusive – I will submit to you that the average church has several instrumentalists within their four walls that they are not using. These people, oftentimes, are high school students who are questioning how to use these very gifts for the Lord. ***Probably the worst assumption of any worship leader about instrumentalists is that it is adequate for them to sing as a substitute for playing their instrument.*** Singing is no substitute when all you really want to do is play.

It’s evangelical . . . and this is where I’d like to start my story.

“Ben, come in”, said the pastor to his worship leader, motioning for him to sit in the chair across from his desk. “I wanted to talk to you about starting an orchestra in our worship services. I know we do a lot of choruses; we have a great praise band, and a wonderful organist. But you have skills in this area, and I know that you could put something together that would be really God-honoring and worthwhile.”

Ben, with cautious excitement responded, “Pastor, let me do some research. . . I’m excited to do this as well. But it will take some time to do it right.” Ben walked out of the pastor’s study, unaware of how he would be starting an adventure that would be one of the most rewarding of his entire ministry. He would see young people amped up about ministry, older adults feeling plugged-in and a congregation experience an expression of worship they had never experienced before. But he also had no clue that this would actually be a portal for a conversion experience for at least one person . . .

Since Ben had been at the church for around three years, he had a decent idea of who played instruments, but he wasn’t sure of the students . . . then, having a daughter in the High School choir, he had an idea. “I’ll go to the local high school band Spring Concert next week and see who’s there.”

One week later, notepad in hand, Ben sat towards the back of the auditorium and enjoyed the band concert. He took notes . . . names of kids – lots of kids – that attended his church. He also noted that the percussion instruments were in need of repair. Being in the drum line in high school and college, he could tell that, and knew what was needed. On his way down to the stage after, first he saw LOTS of parents that he knew, realizing this important fact: **People love their ministers being part of the community scene.** He met the band director who seemed a little distracted, (and who wouldn’t with that many kids on the stage?) Anyhow, in coming to the concert, he started getting some ideas. First,

lots of his church kids played in band, but even more, Ben realized that there were a lot of kids, in the ensemble, who probably didn't have a church home.

The next day, Ben wrote notes to the church member teens that performed in the concert, knowing: **People love positive reinforcement.** He also started sketching out the best-case scenario on paper. He filled out the orchestra of the students he saw the night before, mixed with the adults that he knew played instruments. "Not bad", he thought, "but I'm sure there are probably more, and I'd sure like to tap into the unchurched bunch as well." Ben finished his work, realizing that it was his day for hospital visitation.

On the drive back from the hospital, Ben saw the local music store. He realized that he really had not been there much in his time at the church. He pulled up, and went in. He said hello to the store owner, and discussed his new mission.

The store owner replied, "Well, to do this orchestra, you'd need music stands for sure, I'd be glad to put a bid together for you." Ben replied that that would be wonderful and started for the door, when he saw a flyer up for the community band that was organizing for the summer. The opening rehearsal was in just a few days. Ben said, "Do you need percussionists?" The store owner laughed and said, "Drummers? No . . . Percussionists? Badly!" Ben wrote down the time and took out through the door.

It had been two weeks since the pastor had spoken to Ben about this idea. It was really starting to take shape. But he needed a lot more time. In no time it was Monday night, and Ben came to community band rehearsal with a few percussion instruments in his truck. As he walked in, he saw some familiar faces, but mostly new folks. He saw the high school band director warming up his trombone. He said, "Hi" and then noticed he recognized the percussion instruments, as the ones used in the concert the other night. Adding his own instruments to the mix, he settled right in to find himself the only percussionist in the group. "OOOH", he thought, "Timpani . . . it has been awhile." However, very soon after the downbeat of rehearsal, he found that he was in his element. He also noticed approving nods from the conductor, the music store owner, and the high school band director. This was certainly a way to mix with the community. What he didn't know was that he was in the midst of a people group known as "Cultural Creatives"; a blend of artisans and musicians, a people-group the mainstream North American evangelical church has largely left behind. He started looking around. He noticed a 65 year old woman sitting by a 15 year old "goth" looking off the same music stand in the clarinet section. He saw a buzz-headed teen playing French horn and wearing a USMC t-shirt, and two seats down, a 50ish long-haired trumpet player donned with a tie-dye shirt.

"Wow" thought Ben. "I would love to see this kind of mix in our church".

The end of the rehearsal arrived so very soon, but it came with refreshments. Ben walked over to the table, and conversations started so easily, and cards and phone numbers swapped, some people saying, "friend me" and others writing e-mail addresses carefully. As he was packing his gear, Ben realized an age-old concept that years of business, church and raising a family had removed from his mind until tonight, and this one bears repeating: **Active musicians, attract active musicians.** Ben had a pocketful of

prospects. But one thought was nagging him. “Many prospects that I have are unchurched, and for all I know unsaved.” He knew where his next stop would be.

“Pastor . . . do you have a moment?” Ben asked first thing, the next morning. Upon being ushered into the Pastor’s study, he retold his experiences from the past two weeks. He told the pastor, “We could have a struggling orchestra with the people we have here or, with your permission, we could have a fuller group using people who are unchurched and possibly unsaved.” Ben awaited this answer because he understood well the unspoken code of working on church staff **that if the pastor is behind it and it fits his vision for the church, then the project is worth attempting.**

The pastor heartily agreed, with the understanding that there are some ground rules:

- 1) There must be a code of behavior inside and outside the church for the musicians.
- 2) There must be an enforced rule of modest dress.
- 3) You must actively engage them in conversation about spiritual truth.

At this point, Ben knew what to do next. He set a date. Ben had made an order for music stands, which the dealer had discounted 10% of the total price. He realized that trumpets, trombones, and clarinets could share a stand; flutes and strings, not so much so.

“STRINGS! What do I do about strings?” thought Ben.

Ben had no links to string players, but he remembered the cantata his choir did last Christmas, and remembered in the accompaniment list there was a “String Reduction” part. He went on-line, and purchased it, to see how it would sound on a keyboard.

So Ben set the date for the last of August for the first rehearsal. He had a plan for recruitment, that would unfold. Ben put up flyers at Community Band rehearsal . . .



Ben followed it up by asking permission to make an announcement in rehearsal. Ben also got permission to place a flyer in the music store.

The string reduction came in, and he spoke with a young lady, who had some keyboard skills, to come and play it. She did, and he asked how comfortable she was with this. Stating she was reasonably comfortable (as most of the time these reductions are a little easier than piano parts), she agreed to play “strings” for the orchestra.

Ben also realized that he would have to do some arranging, even if he bought all sorts of orchestrations. He made a quick transposition chart and put it up over his computer.

Instrument	Key	Transposition	Example in C
Trumpet	Bb	Up a step	D
Clarinet	Bb	Up a step	D
Flute	C	Up an octave	C
Horn in F	F	Up a Major 5 th	G
Baritone	C	None	C
Baritone Treble	Bb	Up a step	D
Trombone	C	None	C
Bass Trbn	C	None	C
Tuba	C	Down an Octave	C

He started with downloading some free staff paper on-line, and invested in some composition software. Ben also checked resources from lifewayworship.com to get music that he needed for the orchestra.

As far as recruiting, Ben had called all of the young people he had seen in concert from his church. Most were thrilled to play in an orchestra. He also had a few adults from his church. He called them “anchors”, both musically and spiritually for his group. They were extremely important.

He also mapped out where the orchestra would be placed, and he talked with the church’s AV guy to see if they needed extra microphones.

It was already the first of August, and Ben’s plan was unfolding – but there was one more recruitment plan up his sleeve. After securing permission from the local band director, Ben’s plan went into motion.

It was 2pm, on a Thursday afternoon. The temperature was around 100 degrees. The high school marching band was practicing a maneuver on the field for what seemed to be the fifteenth time, and barely noticed Ben and his pastor driving a truck onto the back field.

The band director, expecting it, did. He called the band to “Attention”. Then over the loudspeaker he barked, “Band . . . about Face!” The sweaty teenagers saw a truck with Ben and the pastor in the back working on something. The band director then announced, “Pastor Don and Pastor Ben from First Baptist have brought you a treat today, they are cutting ice cold watermelons up in the truck . . . stand at ease and form a line; have a slice and thank these pastors!”

The next thirty minutes were quite busy, but totally rewarding. With this, the band director then had the band play a song from the new halftime show for the pastors. Upon their applause, the band director

announced, “First Baptist Church will also be starting an orchestra, if any are interested; Pastor Ben will be at the band room next Monday afternoon to take names.”

August 15th came, and Ben had several people show up, they enjoyed some refreshments and then played in the sanctuary. Ben then told them that they would have several more rehearsals, and then start playing for services in about a month.

The rehearsal looked something like this:

Pre-rehearsal

- Have music stands
- Pencils
- Music
- Maybe also have a bottle of valve oil and cork grease readily available
- Water available

Greetings

Devotional

Short Prayer time

Warm-up

Tuning

Two Pieces

Break (5 minutes)

Two more pieces

Announcements

Recap music

Dismiss with prayer

Ben made a point with meeting with each of the members of the fledgling group to discuss ground rules, and to discuss their spiritual background. Though he was careful not to throw on too much at once, he wanted to develop a good relationship.

The youth director came into rehearsals from time to time to give a quick devotional. This was always well-received. However, there was one young man, who was even more attentive. He had told Ben, that he was used to hearing spiritual lessons spoken in the language of his immigrant family, and that he had never heard Jesus spoken of in such familiar terms. Ben asked if the young baritone player had a Bible. He didn't, and Ben bought him one.

Two weeks later the young man received Christ in the Sunday morning worship service.

Since then, more of the youth are active in Bible studies. Also, there was a strong connection between Ben and the band director. The band director started having Ben work with their percussion section, repairing some of their instruments and even filling in for him as a substitute teacher.

Ben had made in-roads to the culture. . . Ben had become a music missionary, and didn't even know it.

Now though the names and a few circumstances in this story have been changed, this is my story in starting an instrumental ensemble in my church. I will tell you that the watermelon thing did happen, and a young, Polish-Catholic man came to the Lord, almost exactly like that.

In starting an instrumental ensemble, you have a chance to touch a different subset of people. It will be a blessing to you. Here is a list of resources that you might find valuable:

The Instrumental Resource for Church and School by Barrier, Hansford and Johnson. Church Street Press, Nashville 2002. – Probably the most inclusive book for church instrumental music programs.

The Technique of Orchestration by Kent Kennan. Prentice Hall, New Jersey 1983. Gives ranges of instruments and how they work together. It is definitely a reference book.

The Praise and Worship Team Instant Tune-Up by Doug and Tami Flather, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002 – Great, easy-to-read book on working with Praise bands and teams.

Creating a Brass Music Ministry in Your Church (e-book), by John Francis, www.churchbrass.com, 2009. FREE

The Comeback Trumpeter's Guide (e-book), by Rune and Ole, www.churchbrass.com, 1999. FREE

The Exaltation Series by Genevox (LifeWay) is a perfect set for the "misfit" orchestra. They are accessible four-part arrangement, transposed for the different instruments.

<http://www.shop.salvationarmy.org> – The Salvation Army has long been pioneers of church instrumental music. This is their online shop.

http://www.crbond.com/score_paper.htm - Free pre-formatted black score sheets

<http://www.churchbrass.com> – My website, dedicated to church brass players, with free music

<http://www.wwbw.com> – Brasswind/Woodwind instrument site

<http://www.lifewayworship.com> – LifeWay site for downloadable scores

<http://www.lifeway.com> – type 'Orchestration Series' in the search box to find a lot of great charts

<http://www.despub.com> – David E. Smith Publishing, scores of score of sacred instrumental music

<http://www.jwpepper.com> and <http://www.jeffcmusic.com> both great sites for instrumental music

<http://www.parttimemusician.com> – a great site for getting 'in the head' of musicians

Online Musician Finders

<http://www.taxi.com>

<http://www.ralphworld.com>

<http://www.gigfinder.com>

<http://www.musicianscontact.com>

<http://www.indie-music.com>